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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST BATTALION, 504TH PARACHUTE
INFANTRY (82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION) IN THE CAPTURE OF
ALTAVILLA, ITALY, 13 SEPTEMBER - 19 SEPTEMBER, 1943
(NAPLES-FOGGIA CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Operations Officer)

Type of operation described:
BATTALION IN THE ATTACK

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

This bibliography is divided into two sections. Section I is composed of manuscripts including newspapers and magazines. Reference to Section I in the body of the monograph is made by the letter designating the manuscript followed by the page number in the manuscript.

Section II is composed of personal narratives by participants in the operation. In instances of duplication of personal knowledge several references are made. Copies of the narratives are in the possession of the author.

SECTION I

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 1st Battalion, 504 Parachute Infantry, 82nd Airborne Division, in the battle for Altavilla, Italy, 16 September - 19 September, 1943, during the expansion of the Salerno Beachhead. In order to establish the necessary background, related material of earlier date is included.

Allied Staff planning for the invasion of Italy, begun well in advance of the Sicilian Invasion, envisaged a crossing of the Straits of Messina. However, the changing political tempo and the near collapse of the Fascist Party in July, 1943 opened up greater possibilities. (E-1,2) From the landing beaches available on the Italian west coast the narrow plain of Salerno (Map 1) was selected. (E-4)

The United States Fifth Army, under Lieutenant General Mark W. Clark, was to make the amphibious landing. The British 10 Corps and the United States VI Corps would compose the initial assault forces. The British 10 Corps, on the left, would make the main effort. (E-7)

The VI Corps, commanded by Major General Earnest J. Dawley, was to secure the beaches south of the Sele River (Map 2). The assault forces of the VI Corps would be the United States 36th Division, commanded by Major General Fred L. Walker. The 36th Division would seize the beaches in the vicinity of Paestum and move eastward to the high ground. (E-8) These forces were instructed to push inland and secure a line: La Cosa Creek - Mt. Soprano - Trentinara - Ogliastro - Agropoli (Map 2). (H-1) D Day and H Hour were set for 09 0330 September, 1943. (E-9)

On 9 September at H Hour, troops of the 36th Division landed on the Paestum Beaches. (E-19) Behind the assault troops, and in floating reserve, were three regimental combat teams: two from the United States 45th Division and one from the United States 82nd Airborne Division. (E-8) Included in the follow-up troops was the remainder of the 82nd Airborne Division, located in Sicily. (E-8) The 1st Battalion, 504 Parachute Infantry, part of the 82nd Airborne Division, was then located

at Comiso, Sicily (Map 1). (S)

By D plus 2 the VI Corps sector, established against bitter opposition, was firmly anchored on the right in the Trentinara - Ogliastro region (Map 2). (E-45) The Corps center had pushed to the east and included the high ground above the town of Altavilla. However on the Corps left the situation was not favorable. Both regimental combat teams of the 45th Division (part of the floating reserve) had been committed. (E-38,45) The third regimental combat team, from the 82nd Airborne Division, had not yet left Sicily. (A-32)

Late on D plus 4 (13 September) the situation in the VI Corps sector had become so adverse that only artillery had stopped a complete and determined German penetration of the Corps left flank. (E-66) One battalion of the 45th Division had lost five hundred eight officers and men. (E-65) Five battalions of the 36th Division had been savagely hit and pushed back or disorganized in the Sele-Calore corridor and the Altavilla sector. (E-66) A desperate reshuffling of units was being accomplished with troops from the Engineers, Tank Destroyers, Anti Tank Companies, Cannon Companies, and Shore Engineers manning a line west of La Cosa Creek. (E-68) In the VI Corps sector there were no available reserves to call upon. (E-66) The nearest units in time distance were parachute elements of the 82nd Airborne Division in Sicily. (S)

GENERAL SITUATION

Some two hundred fifty miles to the south at Licata Field, Sicily (Map 1), Major General Matthew B. Ridgeway, commanding general of the 82nd Airborne Division, had received a personal letter from the Fifth Army Commander. The letter, flown in from Salerno Beachhead, reached the general at 13 1330 September. Among the items in the letter was a request for the drop of one parachute combat team that night south of the Sele River to reinforce the VI Corps. (A-49) The commander of the 504 Parachute Infantry, Colonel Reuben H. Tucker, who had happened

at
Licata Field was directed to get the 504th alerted and off as soon as troops were ready and troop carrier aircraft were assembled. (I) However, the 1st Battalion was then at Comiso Field, the 2nd Battalion was at Trapani - Milo Field, and the 3rd Battalion was at sea, attached to the division combat element in Army floating reserve. (A-53)

At Comiso Field the 1st Battalion received a warning order about 1400. The battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Warren R. Williams, was made as ready as it could be. Bundles were rolled, combat gear was checked, and ammunition was issued. All was in readiness except for the questions: Where? What? Why? Late in the afternoon the battalion commander and his officers were briefed in the bombed-out hangar at Comiso Field. The mission outlined was to parachute onto a secured drop zone about two miles south of Paestum, Italy (Map 1) and report to a representative of VI Corps who would be there with further instructions. (S)

The troops were briefed with the aid of flashlights and the only available maps, of scale 1/1,500,000. Only in a cursory manner was the situation on Salerno Beachhead known. Company planes were assigned and units began to load bundles. All did not move too smoothly. The last seven planes for B Company did not arrive until 2100 hours. As B Company rapidly loaded into planes, the pilots were being briefed. (S)

Shortly after 2100 the first elements of the battalion were moving down the runway. An hour later B Company took off, attempting to catch the formation. One plane assigned to B Company failed to start. At the last second these troops were distributed among the planes still on the ground. Another plane had a flat tire as it taxied down the strip. There was neither time nor a spare plane to move this group. (S)

Soon the 1st Battalion formation passed over Messina, Sicily (Map 1). General Clark's letter had requested a combat team. Winging its way north was the 504 Parachute Infantry less the 3rd Battalion plus Company C, 307 Airborne Engineer (Combat) Battalion less its 3rd Platoon.

No parachute artillery accompanied the lift. However, the two battalions of infantry could serve good cause. (S,I)

While the flight moves north, stop long enough to consider the organization of the 1st Battalion, 504 Parachute Infantry. Three rifle companies: A, B, and C formed its fighting backbone. Each rifle company contained three rifle platoons. The platoons were in turn composed of three rifle squads and one 60 mm mortar squad. Included in the Headquarters Company were the battalion support weapons: one four-gun light machine gun platoon and one four-gun 81 mm mortar platoon.

No weapons platoons were included in the rifle companies. Instead a light machine gun and an automatic rifle were to be dropped with each rifle squad. Orders on the ground would dictate which was to be carried.

The battalion was light and it lacked several necessities for sustained ground combat: transportation, and high velocity antitank weapons. (S)

ITALY

The regimental lift proceeded across the Tyrrhenian Sea without enemy interference. Approximately halfway out the formation ran into a cloud bank. As it emerged from the far side, planes had lost formation. Elements were above, below, and to either side of the battalion S-3's plane. (S) As the lift neared Agropoli (Map1) several C Company planes flying too close to shore were fired upon by single small caliber weapons with no effect. (J)

Then the red light switched on. Parachutists hustled as they fastened harnesses. Bundles were pushed into the door. Snap fasteners clicked onto the anchor line and down the line came the "readies". Underneath was Agropoli (Map 2), then the sea, then a shore and a stream. As the green light switched on, a large flickering "T" appeared below. Out into space went the bundle and, after it, parachutists snapped out one behind the other. The air was crowded with

troops and bundles. Below, the 2nd Battalion was already moving on the drop zone toward a bright light. The drop zone was black specked, dotted, with masses of rocks and small trees.

When the battalion S-3 landed he received word by passed oral message that the battalion commander wanted him at once at the light. (S) As the time turned midnight the battalion S-3 reported to Colonel Williams. Colonel Williams directed that the battalion executive officer get the troops assembled and loaded into trucks which were standing by on a road east of the drop zone. He and the battalion S-3 were to meet Colonel Tucker at a house a few hundred yards away. As soon as they returned the battalion would move off to somewhere. (S)

The regimental commander was waiting for the arrival of Colonel Williams. As he reported in, a Lieutenant Colonel O'Mohundro (I) of VI Corps began to review the situation in the VI Corps sector. He told of the troops that had been cut off at Altavilla, and of a gap that existed in the VI Corps line into which the regiment, led by corps guides, would move. The regiment would "hold to the last man and last round". (I) Troops were to be warned that men of the 36th Division would undoubtedly be drifting through the lines. (S)

Then Colonel Tucker made his assignments. The 2nd Battalion would defend the left sector; the 1st Battalion, the right, extending up the north slope of Mt. Soprano. (S,I)

When the battalion commander and the S-3 moved back to the trucks, the battalion had already assembled. In one hour they had gathered up bundles and organized into company groups. However only one plane of B Company had dropped on the drop zone. All equipment except two spare machine gun bundles had been recovered. (S) Then came an order to move out. North and then east toward Mt. Soprano went the battalion convoy until some eight miles from the drop zone it halted. The position to be defended was a flat valley floor and the north slopes of Mt. Soprano. (Map 2) Ahead some fifteen hundred yards was La Cosa Creek. At 14 0200

September troops unloaded from the trucks and the battalion commander, unable to make a reconnaissance, gave his orders: Company A on the slope of Mt. Soprano, swing to the east, and tie in with C Company north of the road; Company C from just north of the road, extend across the flat valley to the north, and tie in on Tempone Di San Paolo; dig in before daylight and then continue to develop the position. Then with the battalion S-3 he started on reconnaissance to the La Cosa. Except for Mt. Soprano, the battalion sector was weak. Several minor draws ran north in front of C Company. The ground from C Company to the La Cosa was flat and the La Cosa was not a barrier. The battalion commander and the S-3 then returned to the battalion position to site in the supporting weapons. (S)

Administrative work had to be accomplished. Troops had rations for six meals, but only those who had light equipment to jump had brought blankets. The battalion S-4 was instructed to contact regiment and procure supplies and transportation. A battalion command post and an aid station were located behind A Company's position. Wire lines were run to companies. About the command post was located the one plane load from B Company. What had happened to the remainder of B Company?

One hour behind the regimental airborne lift came five B Company planes. Probably due to insufficient briefing, the pilot of the lead plane gave B Company a green light over the mountains some six miles due south of the drop zone. (K) Upon landing, the company commander, Captain Charles W. Duncan, failed to recognize any landmarks and decided to form a perimeter with his group of some four officers and eighty men. When dawn came this group could see the Paestum beaches to their north. At once they moved off toward the beaches. Near the regimental drop zone they were able to obtain truck transportation and a guide who led them to the battalion defense position. (K) When B Company arrived it was late morning of 14 September. (K)

Little had happened during the early hours of the 14th. Lost men

of the 34th Division had drifted through the lines with information of the Altavilla attack. (S) Engineers were laying a mine field in front of C Company. (S,N)

With the coming of B Company, C Company moved to the north and B Company filled in the center of the battalion sector, astride the road, tying in with A Company on the right. A wire line had reached battalion from regiment. Except for a German tank attack in a sector north of the battalion position and continual enemy air raids, the day moved uneventfully. (S)

During the afternoon patrols from C Company moved to the east and across the La Cosa without enemy contact. (J) Then the 1st Platoon of Company B was ordered to move out before dark and outpost an unnumbered hill southeast of Albanella (Map 2). An SCR 511 was sent with this platoon. (S)

An order to be prepared to counterattack a German force that was preparing to attack from north of the La Cosa never materialized. (S;G-20)

After dark Captain Duncan, B Company, took his 2nd Platoon and moved out to join the 1st Platoon south of Albanella since radio contact could not be made. (S)

The morning of 15 September dawned clear and hot. Messages from the B Company outpost reported flares during the night and German vehicles observed at some distance, but no enemy contact. (Q) Air raids over the beaches and light shelling in the battalion sector were the only visible enemy activity. Rations had been procured by the S-4 but as yet no blankets were available. (S)

A combat patrol from C Company was sent out in the afternoon toward the valley between Albanella and Altavilla northeast of the battalion sector (Map 2). Its mission was to make contact with the Germans. The patrol would stay out over night and return the next morning. (S)

During the day the battalion commander contacted the 3rd Battalion, 531st Shore Engineers on the top of Mt. Soprano. Word reached battalion

that on the night of 14-15 September the 505 Parachute Infantry had dropped on the drop zone south of Paestum and was now in position on, and south of, Mt. Soprano. (E-73,77;S) The remainder of 15 September passed with no enemy activity or contact in the battalion sector. (S)

On the morning of 16 September about 1000 hours, the regimental commander was called to VI Corps command post. There he was instructed that his two battalions would leave from Albanella that afternoon at 1400 to attack and seize Altavilla. Artillery support would be furnished by the 36th Division Artillery. (I) It was noon when the 1st Battalion received an order to move to Albanella and be prepared to attack the town of Altavilla. (S,I) Troops would move out and the battalion commander would receive the attack order at Albanella. (I)

The battalion, spread out over the flats and along the slope of Mt. Soprano, was too widely dispersed to be pulled in rapidly. A foot messenger was sent by the S-3 to Captain Duncan and his outpost to tell them to meet the battalion in Albanella. A Company and C Company began to pull in outposts. (S)

While C Company prepared to move, its combat patrol returned. They had much to report. They had engaged in three fire fights. Considerable enemy artillery and mortar fire had fallen on them. However the resistance seemed so scattered that it was deemed unimportant. (S)

A regimental patrol reported that some forty enemy tanks were located on the reverse slope of a hill about a mile and a half southeast of Altavilla. (G-11)

By 1400 the battalion was moving with a file on either side of the dirt road which ran northeast through the defense sector to Albanella. The order of march was A Company, C Company, 3rd Platoon of B Company, and Headquarters Company. 1400 hours, which was the time scheduled for beginning the attack, found the battalion walking with some four miles yet to be covered before Albanella could be reached. (S)

Companies had dropped their spare machine guns and individual field

bags in company piles for the S-4 to pick up. The remaining weapons, including light machine guns and mortars, were being hand carried. All the ammunition that could be hand carried was being moved. One vehicle, a quarter-ton truck, was the sole battalion transportation. Troops had such rations as they could carry and only the water in their canteens was available as they moved out in the hot sun along the dusty road. (S)

When the battalion moved across La Cosa flats German artillery shelled the column causing some casualties. (J,S) The climb up Albanella Hill was difficult ~~to both~~ the machine gun and the 81 mm mortar platoons. Only the efforts of the battalion executive officer kept them moving. (S)

As the battalion commander and the S-3 moved with the point to the road junction several hundred yards north of Albanella, the battalion commander attempted to move a small fallen tree. Attached to the tree was a small concussion charge which knocked him down, though it did not injure him. (S)

At the road junction, at 1600, a messenger met the battalion. He had come to guide the commander to where Colonel Tucker would issue his order. The battalion commander directed the S-3 to take the column through Albanella and swing north on a trail that showed on his map as going from Albanella to Altavilla (Map 2). He would meet the battalion there and issue his order to the company commanders. Further he wanted Captain Duncan located and his force tied in with the column. Then the battalion commander left. (S)

Once the battalion had entered the narrow streets of Albanella, the trail could only be located through conversation with Italian civilians. Finally one Italian led the battalion through several back yards and down a slope which led into the trail. (S)

There the S-3 left the battalion halted, and moved east across the draw to the next ridge several hundred yards away. On the trail that moved north on this second ridge he located B Company moving north.

While guiding B Company to the battalion column, Captain Duncan and the battalion S-3 met the battalion commander. (S)

Colonel Williams had already issued his order to the other three unit commanders. He reviewed what little information he had. The 1st Battalion would move out at once with the mission of seizing Hill 424 which was northeast of Altavilla. The 2nd Battalion would follow and seize Hill 315 and an Unnumbered Hill. The battalion would stay out of Altavilla. (I,N,S)

The battalion would cross the line of departure, which was at the bottom of Albanella Hill, in single file. A Company would lead, followed by C Company, B Company, and Headquarters Company. All resistance en route to the objective would be bypassed if possible. The battalion would be dug in on Hill 424 by daylight. The trail on which the battalion commander stood led into Altavilla. However, just east of Altavilla, the battalion would swing off the trail onto the high ground and approach Hill 424 from the east. (S)

The 132nd Field Artillery Battalion of the 36th Division Artillery would support the battalion. As yet no forward observers or liaison officers had reported. Elements of the 505 Parachute Infantry would be screening the right flank of the regiment. (S)

The best the battalion commander had time to do in issuing his order was to point at a hill in a group of hills. In the town of Altavilla a fire was burning. No recent enemy information was available. Company commanders orders and reconnaissances were to be made as the battalion marched out in response to a message to move. (S)

As the battalion commander moved out with A Company he directed the battalion S-2 and the S-3 to tie the column in. Then a forward observer reported in to the battalion commander who instructed him to move with A Company. That forward observer moved away and was not seen again by the battalion. (S)

The S-2 and the S-3 contacted the battalion executive at the tail of

the column who informed them that elements of the 81 mm mortar platoon were still closing in. Since he was closing the column up, the S-2 and the S-3 moved up and crossed the line of departure with B Company. (S) Thus, at approximately 1730 hours 16 September the 1st Battalion moved out towards Hill 424. (S,U)

Some three and one-half hours after the time scheduled by VI Corps, the regiment was moving out in attack. Even with this time lag the battalion commander had had no time for reconnaissance or coordination. Company commanders were briefing platoon leaders as they marched out. Troops were almost wholly in ignorance of the mission other than the words Hill 424 and Altavilla. And, to them, Altavilla meant only what survivors of the 36th Division had told them as they had drifted through the battalion defense sector during the previous days. (S)

TERRAIN AND TACTICS

Of what importance was this hill toward which the battalion was moving? On 12-13 September the Germans had pushed the 1st Battalion, 142nd Infantry off the hill. (E-53) Again on the night of 13-14 September the Germans had viciously beaten back the 1st and 3rd Battalions, 142nd Infantry and the 3rd Battalion, 143rd Infantry. (E-60)

From Hill 424 the enemy could see the beaches at Paestum. He could watch movements across La Cosa Creek and the Sele-Calore sector (Map 2). (E-41) As long as he held the hill he had excellent observation of the VI Corps sector. (E-41) On the southwest slope of Hill 424 sat the town of Altavilla (Map 3), unimportant in itself since the hill commanded it completely. (E-41) However, as the hub of several roads and numerous trails toward the Calore River, it served as a focal point toward which German troops could be quickly moved. (S)

Looking from Albanella toward Altavilla, Hill 424 appears as the critical terrain feature (Map 2). Just south of Hill 424 is Unnumbered Hill that does not seem to merit further attention when the objective is

Hill 424. Some five hundred yards to the southwest of Unnumbered Hill and almost a nose of it is Hill 315. About one thousand yards southeast of Unnumbered Hill is Hill 344. Closer inspection would reveal that Unnumbered Hill, instead of being a satellite to Hill 424, completely dominates it as well as Hills 315 and 344. (G-1, Incl 2; S)

On the slopes of the hills were intermittent streams, dry now, that had cut deep gullies into the slopes. Numerous additional erosion features such as dips and gullies marred the hillside. Many of these had steep sides and narrow bottoms.

Trails that went from Albanella to Altavilla followed north on noses jutting from the hill mass. These trails dipped through draws and gullies and often formed narrow defiles as they did so. Lining the trails were trees and stone walls. In places the trails moved along terraced levels with drops on one side and walls on the other. A profusion of minor footpaths and trails joined the main trail, the one along which the battalion was moving. (S)

Cultivated fields and farm houses were surrounded by stone walls. Along portions of these walls there were trees. (S)

Cognizant of the terrain and affected by the heavy American artillery, the Germans had adopted a set of peculiar tactics to hold the hills. Occupying only certain features with outposts and observation parties the enemy would be alerted as American troops entered the hill mass. From their covered positions would come the enemy main force which, after locating the American forces, would maneuver through gullies and ditches to hit the American forces from all directions. Often they were not detected until they were on the positions. With these tactics the enemy had driven out the previous 36th Division attackers. (G-2, Incl 2)

THE APPROACH MARCH

Return now to the 1st Battalion as it moved northward on the trail toward Altavilla. The point of the battalion column, the 1st Platoon of

Company A, was moving rapidly. As the point came to the creek north of Albanella Hill (Map 2) a sub plane dropped a message that warned of some German outposts several hundred yards to the north. (S) Behind the point, the battalion column was still closing up. Heavy enemy artillery was falling in the draw from which the battalion had come. (S) With more caution, the point moved north and just before dark, as it reached a spur fifteen hundred yards north of the creek, a German machine gun opened up on it (Map 3). To the east and west of this gun, on adjacent spurs, two more enemy machine guns joined the firing. As the point hit the sides of the trail, the point commander ordered his 60 mm mortar into action. Several rounds were all that was necessary to put the nearest enemy outpost out of action. Three or four Germans (Polish-Germans) who were manning this machine gun promptly surrendered. (L,U) The machine gun to the west had been silenced by a squad which the company commander had dispatched. The east machine gun was taken care of by the screening force. (U)

When the point started to move again it was dark. Enemy mortar fire and artillery fire was falling on both sides of the battalion column. Heavy concentrations were falling to the rear of the battalion. Most of the concentrations seemed to be unobserved. (S)

About five hundred yards north of the first enemy contact the column halted. A series of footpaths entered the trail and the point was confused. The battalion commander and Captain Willard J. Harrison, Company A commander, reconnoitered ahead for the correct trail. (S)

The battalion S-2 and the S-3, moving up the column, noted the condition of the men. Except for short halts they had been moving since noon and, when the column halted, most of them had stretched out on the trail unmindful of shells that were landing in the adjacent fields. Platoon leaders asked the situation. Several non-coms in B Company were walking up and down the single file watching for the column ahead of them to move. As the S-3 reached Captain Duncan a message came from the rear,

of the column that an artillery observer was looking for Colonel Williams. The S-3 sent the messenger back with instructions to have the forward observer come up to B Company where he would meet him. (S) As Captain Duncan and the S-3 waited, Captain Duncan commented that the rate of march was too fast. His men were already tired and if the pace were continued the Germans might have him at a disadvantage in the morning. As the artillery observer came up he was warmly greeted. He identified himself as the battalion's artillery liaison officer. The whereabouts of the observer who had reported earlier was unknown to him. The liaison officer's only comment was that he had his radio. He had been to Altavilla twice already and hoped it wouldn't take a fourth trip. (S)

The time was about 2200. The halt had been of some thirty or forty minutes duration when the S-3 started toward the point. Then a message came from Company B's leading platoon that contact had been lost between the 3rd Platoon of C Company and the column in front of it. Captain Duncan and the S-3 moved to the break in the column.

THE BREAK

In front of Company B's leading platoon, Captain Duncan and the S-3 found the C Company executive officer and C Company's 3rd Platoon leader. Their story was brief. Men had fallen asleep. A man looking up saw that the man who had been before him was no longer there. As he called back, he frantically tried to find the column in front of him with no success. The platoon leader, upon investigating the commotion, had sent out a two man patrol north on the trail and had reported the break to the C Company executive officer who was marching at the rear of C Company. (S)

As the S-3 awaited word from the contact patrol, a quick check was made of the forces. The 3rd Platoon of C Company was still on the trail; tied in behind it was B Company, followed by Headquarters Company. Ahead somewhere was A Company and C Company with the battalion commander. Ene-

my artillery was falling in the vicinity. Behind and to the east enemy machine guns, with their characteristic sound, were firing at something. (S)

Company B's radio, an SCR 511, was brought forward and an effort, unsuccessful, was made to contact Colonel Williams, A Company, or C Company. (S)

Soon the C Company contact patrol was back. They had gone north on the trail a short distance but had neither seen nor heard anything. It was then decided that the S-3 would command this force until contact had been established. (S)

The S-3 decided that the 3rd Platoon of C Company would furnish the point. B Company would follow. The artillery liaison officer would accompany Captain Duncan. The column would continue north on the trail. These arrangements were made without knowing the present location or the exact route to the objective. Both the S-3 and Captain Duncan were hazy as to the location of Hill 424. (S)

The march was resumed and the point had gone several hundred yards north when machine pistol fire from the left of the trail stopped it. As the column dispersed to the right of the trail, the S-3 contacted the point commander. His orders to the point commander were to swing off to the right toward the high ground; bypass the Germans; and when the point got on the hill (Hill 392), halt, and the column would close in. (S)

The point swung off to the right of the trail and to the east without returning the fire of the machine pistols. It dropped down into a steep gully and then climbed up the fairly steep slopes of the hill. When it reached the top, the S-3 ordered the point commander to guard the north side of the hill. As B Company came up it was swung to the west and south of the hill. Headquarters Company was routed to the east and southeast. As Headquarters Company moved in it was found that the 81 mm mortar platoon was completely missing. (S)

The moon had risen and was full. In its light the S-3 reconnoitered

to the north, Captain Duncan to the west, and the battalion S-2 to the east. When they met to discuss the situation over the only map, Captain Duncan's, it was decided that Hill 424 was further to the north. The march would be resumed again. (S)

COMPANY A

Let us turn back in time to where contact with the battalion had been broken. When Colonel Williams and Captain Harrison returned to Company A the march was resumed on the trail. About 2230 the battalion commander realized that neither C Company nor B Company was following. Nevertheless he decided to push on to Hill 424 in the hope of reassembling his battalion there. (U,N) As A Company moved along the trail it swung south around Hill 315 without resistance. (U,L,N) The point halted at 2245 when it heard noises about one hundred yards to the right of the trail. Colonel Williams, Captain Harrison, and ten men investigated and found a concrete dugout which they entered without resistance. (U,L) Inside were about seven Germans, completely surprised. They were a communications group operating a switchboard and telephones. The Germans were taken prisoners and their equipment was cut up. (U,L)

The company continued to move around to the west slope of Hill 315. As it swung north several enemy machine guns opened fire. The A Company commander, assuming that he had run into an enemy final protective line, passed word down from the head of the column to avoid the machine guns. (U) The 3rd Platoon, the last platoon in the column, received this message as "Fix bayonets and charge that machine gun". This they promptly did. Yelling and screaming, the platoon rushed the nearest machine gun, from which the Germans rapidly fled. It was some while before Captain Harrison could reconstitute his column. (N) Then without further enemy contact A Company, skirting the west edge of Hill 315, moved north. (U)

It was about 17 0100 September when A Company halted near a well on

the southwest slope of Unnumbered Hill. Friendly artillery fire was falling near the column. Colonel Williams, Captain Harrison, and the point reconnoitered the top of the hill. (L,N,U) Since it appeared to dominate the adjacent hills they mistook it for Hill 424 and decided to organize the crest. (N) When they returned to the company, some of the men were filling their canteens and others were sleeping. (L) About 0130 Company A moved to the crest of Unnumbered Hill. Captain Harrison placed his 1st Platoon on the north slope. To its west and swinging south went the 2nd Platoon; to the right of the 1st Platoon and swinging southeast, the 3rd Platoon. Men were ordered to dig in and get set for daybreak. (L)

Though the battalion commander had tried, radio contact with regiment and with his other companies had failed. (N) Two contact patrols to the rear had not yet returned. (U) By 17 0200 September the battalion commander, with one third of the battalion under his control, held Unnumbered Hill, thinking it was Hill 424.

COMPANY C

Where was the third rifle company of the battalion, Company C? Captain Milloy, commanding Company C, discovered during the long halt that several men of Company A had lost contact with the rest of their company. On discovering this, Captain Milloy moved out with C Company in an effort to regain contact. When he failed to do this he swung his company toward the high ground to the right and moved north along the slopes of the hills. As C Company neared hill 344, Captain Milloy heard mortars firing off to his right. Thinking they might be A Company, he sent a patrol toward the mortars. Shortly a fire fight was heard and the patrol returned to report that the mortars were the enemy's. As C Company continued to the northwest, firing began to their south and southeast but at some distance. Between Hill 344 and Unnumbered Hill, the point cleared out four enemy outposts, killing or

forcing out the enemy. About 2300 C Company halted at the well on the southwest slope of Unnumbered Hill. (J) Ahead of him Captain Milloy saw a deep valley. Beyond it was a hill which he correctly assumed was Hill 424. Since his company had been delayed by the German outposts, Captain Milloy believed that A Company was already on Hill 424. The valley was still. Hill 424 was still. Rather than risk being fired on by A Company or being ambushed by the Germans, Captain Milloy decided to send a patrol to Hill 424. (J)

Lieutenant James Dunn, the patrol leader, was instructed to move up the valley and reconnoiter Hill 424. The company would wait for his return. (J)

Another patrol was sent down the trail toward the east. As they neared a church on the north slope of Hill 315, an enemy machine gun opened fire on them and they were forced to withdraw. (J)

Now a new element entered the picture. Colonel Tucker, the regimental commander, had come into C Company's position. In a few moments Captain Milloy had briefed Colonel Tucker. (I,J)

Colonel Tucker had with him the regimental staff except for the S-4. He informed Captain Milloy that he could reinforce C Company with some fourteen Engineers and 505 Parachute Infantry men whom he had gathered en route. (I,J) Where had the command group come from? From his command post at the base of Albanella Hill, Colonel Tucker had soon lost radio contact with his two battalions. Enemy artillery had forced the command group to move. With this group, Colonel Tucker had struck off for Unnumbered Hill. His small force had bypassed many enemy outposts. Nowhere along his route had he run into the battalions. Except for the men whom he had picked up, Captain Milloy's force was the first unit he had found. (I)

As the Colonel and the Captain talked they heard a rustle in the bushes ahead of them. Upon investigating they captured a German officer, artillery observer, and two men. (I,J)

Then Lieutenant Dunn returned. A Company was not on the hill. Only a few Germans held the hill, and the patrol had found a back route that would lead to Hill 424 without hitting the enemy. (J) Expecting the remainder of the 1st Battalion at any moment, Colonel Tucker decided to take Hill 424 with this force. (I)

At midnight the force, consisting of two platoons of Company C plus about twenty men and the regimental command group, moved out across the valley that separated Unnumbered Hill from Hill 424. (J) As the company moved up the slope of Hill 424 Captain Milloy noticed an object about fifteen yards off the path. On investigating it, he found a light tank without its crew. Two men were instructed to disable it. Either they did not know how or they were concerned lest they lose the column. In either event they did not disable the tank. More was to be heard from the tank later. (J)

Company C moved on to the crest of Hill 424 without resistance and began to dig into a perimeter defense. The men whom Colonel Tucker had picked up were put into the line on the west edge of the perimeter. (J)

As the group was organizing, an enemy patrol hit them. In the confusion that followed, the regimental executive officer and the S-1 were wounded. The enemy patrol was split up. One German was shot by the regimental S-3 as he attempted to sneak up on the command post within the perimeter. (J)

Colonel Tucker had been trying with no success to establish radio contact with the battalions. He then sent two messengers in an attempt to reach the 1st Battalion. Both men were killed. (I) Sporadic small arms and machine pistol fire hit into the perimeter from all sides. (C) At 0400 the regimental S-3, Major D. Dunham, and the operations sergeant, Sergeant Jack Furst, volunteered to try once again to break out of the perimeter. (C,I,J) Five minutes later, machine pistol fire was heard. About ten minutes later, Sergeant Furst returned alone. The S-3 had been killed. (C,I) Three more men volunteered and started off. Noth-

ing was heard from this group. (J)

COMPANY B

Back on Hill 392, the battalion S-3 had decided to move his column to the hill to the north (Hill 344). As the company officers moved about, pulling in security and awakening men, there was some grumbling but most of the men, though tired, were cheerful. (S)

With Company B leading, the column moved out again in single file toward Hill 344 which was some five hundred yards away. Between the two hills the narrow trail dropped off on several terraces which made walking difficult. (S)

On reaching Hill 344 the column was marched into a perimeter. Two patrols from B Company were sent out. One patrol would move to the north on the trail running off Hill 344. Its instructions were to contact Colonel Williams. The other would move to the east and contact any battalion elements that it could find. The S-3 and Captain Duncan reconnoitered to the north. Off to the north several hundred yards away a battery of mortars, apparently German, were firing into the valley to the west. (S)

When the S-3 returned to the perimeter he was informed that the commanding officer of the 2nd Battalion had arrived there. In a short conference the 2nd Battalion commander stated that the hill on which he now stood was Unnumbered Hill. His troops would shortly be there. From this the battalion S-3 gathered that the next hill to the north must be Hill 424. He alerted Company B and Headquarters Company to be ready to move again. (S)

About 17 0100 September the B Company patrol that had gone north on the trail returned. Its leader, Sergeant Gerald Murphy, reported to the S-3 that he had contacted Colonel Tucker near a well on the next hill north. (S) Colonel Tucker's message was "Bring the battalion down here at once". (S,I) As rapidly as the column could, it moved

out with Sergeant Murphy leading the point. (S) About 0200 he halted at a well below Unnumbered Hill and said that this was where Colonel Tucker had been. (S)

The battalion S-2 and the S-3 reconnoitering along the trail ran into Colonel Williams who had just left A Company as it had moved up Unnumbered Hill.

UNNUMBERED HILL

In the conversation between Colonel Williams and the battalion S-3 it developed that Colonel Williams had A Company. The S-3 had the 3rd Platoon of C Company, all of B Company, and Headquarters Company less the 81 mm mortar platoon. Somewhere, after the column had started, a platoon of Company C, 307 Airborne Engineers (Combat) Battalion had tied in behind Headquarters Company. In addition, some twenty men of B Company, 505 Parachute Infantry, the flank security, had joined the column. Where the remainder of C Company was, was unknown. No one on Unnumbered Hill had seen Colonel Tucker. (S)

Colonel Williams then issued his order for the defense of Unnumbered Hill. A Company would continue to organize the top of the hill, extending along the north and northeast slope. B Company would tie in to the left of A Company, extending along the west slope of Unnumbered Hill and then along the southwest slope. The 3rd Platoon of C Company would tie in on the right of A Company and swing south. Between the platoon of C Company and B Company, along the south slope would go the Engineers and the men of 505. (N,S) One two-gun light machine gun section was attached to B Company and the other to the 3rd Platoon of C Company. (N) All platoons would go into the line to form the perimeter. Troops would be dug in and alert at daylight. (S)

While the companies prepared their positions, a patrol with the German prisoners, was dispatched to the south to contact the 81 mm mortar platoon. (N,S)

When the battalion commander and the S-3 walked around the positions, they noted a saucer shaped depression between the 3rd Platoon, C Company and B Company. The depression was over ten feet deep. Without difficulty troops could be moved from the southeast edge of the perimeter to positions behind A Company or B Company. (N,S) In this saucer, about forty yards behind B Company's main line of resistance, was located the battalion command post. Some sixty yards east of the command post was a narrow, deep gully. In this gully the battalion aid station was located. The lone artillery observer was placed near the command post. Rapidly he set up his radio and attempted to contact his fire direction center without success. Though on the wrong hill the battalion, except for the missing portions, was defensively set. As yet no radio contact had been established. (S)

Alternately Colonel Williams and the S-3 dug foxholes and checked positions. The troops in A Company and B Company were preparing positions some forty to sixty yards below the crest. Outposts of A Company and B Company had been posted farther down the north slope of Unnumbered Hill in order to overlook the ravine which separated it from the hill to the north (Hill 424). In the bright moonlight, troops were busy digging. Off on Hill 424 an occasional machine pistol and machine gun fired, but not at Unnumbered Hill. (S)

Before daylight 17 September a machine gun from the direction of Altavilla opened up at long range and fired several bursts into the position of 2nd Platoon, B Company. (K) Then a messenger from A Company reported that someone had been heard yelling "Geronimo" from the hill to the north. Companies were alerted to watch for incoming paratroopers and were cautioned not to be tricked by Germans. (S) Just at daybreak several men of A Company who had taken their squad's empty canteens to the well were fired upon. Having only a carbine among them, they fled, leaving the canteens. (L,S) At daybreak Colonel Williams ordered A Company to send a patrol to the hill to the north to investigate what appeared to be

friendly troops. (S) Captain Harrison ordered his 1st Platoon to move out. (S) The 2nd Platoon was to hold the vacated positions with a skeleton force. (L) As the lead scout stepped out he was killed by enemy fire. The second scout ran out and was killed. The platoon leader running out to his scouts was wounded. As he lay out in front of his platoon position, Captain Harrison ordered the 1st Platoon back into their foxholes. As they covered him, he ran out and brought back the platoon leader, under both friendly and enemy fire. Apparently A Company's patrol had run into a German force coming to Unnumbered Hill. As the Germans attacked along the draw which leads into the hill from the northeast, word was sent to C Company's 3rd Platoon to move through the saucer behind A Company. In the fire fight that followed the enemy was repelled. No enemy artillery was used. Only enemy mortar concentrations landed on Unnumbered Hill. Evidently the Germans had not expected to find anyone on Unnumbered Hill. (S) The short action had cost A Company two men killed and five men wounded. (U)

In B Company's sector riflemen observed a group of fifteen or twenty Germans moving to their front along the south slopes of Hill 424. When the Germans were taken under rifle and automatic rifle fire by B Company, the enemy was confused and withdrew to Altavilla. (K,S)

It was now about 17 0800 September. On Unnumbered Hill radio contact with regiment had not yet been established. The artillery observer had not been able to contact his battalion. (S)

HILL 424

On Hill 424 Colonel Tucker and Captain Milloy had been busy. At daybreak (17 September) Colonel Tucker still had not been able to establish contact, either by patrol or radio, with the other elements of his regiment. (I) Captain Milloy, at daybreak, had sent a small patrol toward Altavilla. (J)

The patrol moved out down a steep trail that ran into town. Soon

they were back. At the foot of the trail they had come upon a self propelled gun and a light tank, the same tank that had been ordered destroyed the night before. The patrol wanted a bazooka and then it would go back and attempt to knock the armor out. As they moved back down the trail they ran into a German combat patrol that drove them back. (J)

Another C Company combat patrol was sent to the north to contact the enemy. Just outside the perimeter it ran into a strong German force coming from the north. The C Company patrol withdrew leaving one man dead. (J)

Then from the west the tank and the self propelled gun opened fire on the C Company perimeter. The company commander could hear troops moving on the trail along which the earlier C Company patrol had moved. They made considerable noise as they came up the steep slope from Altavilla. When these troops came into sight they were seen to be a force of some fifty Germans. After they had gotten within seventy five yards of the perimeter, C Company opened fire, completely routing the force. As the Germans withdrew, the tank and the self propelled gun intensified their fire. From the north, west, and southwest enemy small arms fired sporadically into the perimeter and then died down. (J)

At 17 0930 September Colonel Tucker, unable to contact the remainder of the 1st Battalion and having identified friendly troops on Unnumbered Hill, ordered a withdrawal to Unnumbered Hill. C Company and the regimental group withdrew without any enemy reaction. (J,I)

UNNUMBERED HILL 17 0800 SEPTEMBER - 17 1200 SEPTEMBER

Over on Unnumbered Hill B Company, shortly after 0800, observed enemy troops moving from the edge of Altavilla into the valley and toward Unnumbered Hill. As Colonel Williams and the S-3 watched this force of some seventy five to one hundred Germans moving, another smaller enemy force appeared from the south edge of Altavilla and swung around Hill 315. (S) As the Germans approached within three hundred yards of B Company, men

opened fire. The Germans broke into small groups that moved forward from bush to bush and terrace to terrace. (S)

Colonel Williams then ordered troops on the east edge of the perimeter into position on the edge of the saucer facing Altavilla. Enemy artillery began to fall on B Company and into the saucer. (S)

By this time some fifty men including about six automatic riflemen were firing at the enemy. (S) As the Germans sought cover, the 60 mm mortar of the 2nd Platoon of B Company drove them out into the open. The 60 mm mortar squad leader, Sergeant Douglas Morehead, was directing the mortar fire from the crest of the saucer. His mortar crew was some fifteen feet behind him. From down on the forward slope Lieutenant William Meerman (3rd Platoon leader, B Company) was calling out targets to Sergeant Morehead. (S,K) As the German attack slowed down and then dropped back Colonel Williams ordered the mortar to stop firing. It had expended much of its ammunition and resupply was not certain. (S)

Enemy artillery concentrations of thirty to forty rounds each and mortar fire hit the slopes of Unnumbered Hill. Then a mist began to gather in the valley obscuring Altavilla and parts of Hill 424. The battalion waited. (S)

Though the mist did not last more than a half hour it seemed much longer. The troops on the forward slope were tense and word was being passed back and forth to watch for infiltrations. (S)

When the mist thinned, an enemy tank opened fire on Unnumbered Hill. At the northeast edge of Altavilla, on the road that ran east along Hill 424 could be seen three German tanks. All three tanks soon began to fire into foxhole after foxhole along the northwest slope of Unnumbered Hill. The tanks first fired on the foxholes on the west edge of A Company, then along the 2nd and 3rd Platoons of B Company. (S,K,L)

A direct hit on a bazooka position of the 2nd Platoon, B Company blasted two men out of the position. The platoon leader of the 2nd Platoon of A Company and his aid man ran down. They were joined by the 1st

Platoon leader of A Company and his platoon sergeant. Another shell burst wounded the A Company platoon leader before the bazooka team could be evacuated. (S,L)

On the right flank of the 2nd Platoon, B Company was a company strong point dug in among a cluster of trees. Two shell bursts killed six men there. (S,K)

As the tanks fired, a German attack was launched from the northwest along the draw against the 1st Platoon of A Company. In a short fire fight the German force was driven back with some loss. (U,N,S) Though the German tank support had hit the battalion northwest perimeter hard, the 1st and 3rd Platoons of A Company had not been affected by the tank fire. (S)

While the tanks had been active, the artillery observer had gained radio contact. Soon VI Corps artillery was firing on Altavilla and on the tanks. (N,S) As the German tanks and infantry withdrew, enemy artillery again began to pound Unnumbered Hill.

The battalion S-3 with a command post detail moved to the aid station to collect ammunition from the wounded. Some of the troops had reached a critical low in small arms. In the aid station were some twenty wounded. About ten men had been killed so far in the morning's action. (S)

THE BATTALION REORGANIZES

In the lull that followed the last tank-infantry enemy attack, word reached Colonel Williams that Colonel Tucker and C Company had come in through A Company's position. (S)

When Colonel Tucker got to Colonel Williams and the S-3 he demanded, "Where in the Hell have you been?" (N,S) In a brief conference it was decided that A Company would move out at once to seize Hill 424. C Company would reorganize and then follow A Company. B Company would take over the defense of Unnumbered Hill until the 2nd Battalion could be

brought up. (S,N,I)

While troops were changing positions, an evacuating group of walking wounded was organized. The least seriously wounded, armed with rifles, would protect the group. Included in this group were the regimental executive officer, the regimental S-1, two newspaper reporters (Richard Tregaskis, INS and Seymour Korman, Chicago Tribune) (C), A Company's 1st and 2nd Platoon leaders, and some ten men. The group moved out toward Albanella supporting several of their party. (S,L)

A Company, in single file and well dispersed, moved off rapidly along the west slope of the saddle that connected Unnumbered Hill with Hill 424. The time was about 1030. (S)

THE RETURN TO HILL 424

A Company, moving along the west slope of Hill 424, was soon fired on by a German machine gun. The fire killed three men of the point. (N) Without much delay A Company eliminated the machine gun and moved on along the north slope and into position on the west slope facing Altavilla. The foxholes that were occupied had been prepared by both Germans and Americans. (S) As the company deployed, a German force, estimated as a company, without machine guns or artillery preparation struck the position. (U) Captain Harrison radioed a request for artillery to Colonel Williams. He had spotted two tanks in the churchyard north of Altavilla. (U,S) Relaying the message to the forward observer, Colonel Williams asked if Captain Harrison could adjust. As Corps Artillery fired, Captain Harrison adjusted on the tanks and forced them to move. (S) However, Corps Artillery now informed the observer that the limit of its range would carry only to the north slope of Hill 424. (U,S) More distant artillery fire would have to come from the navy. (S) (A VI Corps Artillery report shows that Corps fired concentrations of four hundred eighty rounds each every ten minutes on the north slopes of Hill 424. (H))

About noon, a German force estimated by Captain Harrison as two com-

panies attacked A Company striking from the direction of Altavilla and the west slope of Hill 424. The attack was preceded by an intensive mortar barrage. Enemy machine guns covered the moving German troops. (U) With the aid of VI Corps Artillery, A Company beat off the attack. The German force was disorganized by the artillery and small arms to such an extent that small groups of the enemy broke off and moved about without control. (U)

As the Germans reorganized, small patrols began to hit A Company. One German patrol approached a platoon position. It moved up until only a walled trail separated the two forces. Not realizing how close they were, the German patrol leader gave orders to his men. A private (Private First Class Peter Schneider, German born) heard the German officer. Calling first to his platoon sergeant, Private Schneider gave an order to the Germans. As he ordered them to move about he and the platoon sergeant killed or dispersed all of the group of eight or ten Germans. (S,C)

Fearing that A Company might be completely cut off after another attack, Colonel Williams ordered C Company to move out at once. The Engineers and the men of 505 would also move with the company. The battalion S-2 and the S-3 would take some men and move along the northeast slope of Unnumbered Hill, along the east slope of the saddle and join the battalion commander on Hill 424. (S)

About 1300 the C Company column moved out along the west slope of the saddle. (S)

No enemy was apparent as the S-3 and his group moved out along the west slope of Unnumbered Hill. Only enemy artillery fell on Hill 424 and Unnumbered Hill. Without incident except for mortar fire, the group reached the battalion commander on the west side of Hill 424. (S)

C Company was placed in position along the north side of Hill 424, tying in with A Company to its left. The east flank of C Company was covered by the Engineers and the 505 men. (S)

The next German attack, about 1500 hours, struck against A Company from the west slope of Hill 424 and against C Company from the northwest. The attack was preceded by a heavy artillery and mortar preparation that lasted about an hour. Again enemy machine guns covered the advance of an estimated two German companies. The Germans coming up the slopes could be seen as they got within some three hundred yards of the riflemen's positions. (S)

As M-1's and automatic rifles took the enemy under fire, navy fire was requested on the main enemy force which was approaching A Company. The mission would be fired but a comment was passed along with the approval that the force on Hill 424 would be in a dangerous position. (S,U) As the men were warned to stay in their foxholes, a terrific naval bombardment pounded the northwest slope of Hill 424. The Germans stopped, then broke off the fight, and withdrew. Another naval concentration was fired on the north slope of Hill 424. (S)

During the attack A Company had suffered approximately twenty casualties including the company executive officer and the first sergeant who were both killed by air bursts. (S)

The battalion S-3 had now established a command post on the south slope of Hill 424 against a high terrace wall. Then he joined Colonel Williams at C Company. Most of the troops had found foxholes already dug. Some of C Company were occupying the same holes they had left in the morning. (S)

C Company was established along a narrow sunken trail. To his front, Captain Milloy had pushed out strong points after the Germans had withdrawn to cover the numerous draws that entered his position.

A Company occupied a position that overlooked the steep slopes toward Altavilla. Only from its outposts could the town itself be seen. On the south slope of Hill 424 the Engineers and the 505 men were dug into terraces that overlooked the ravine. (S) Though the fields of fire were short and observation was made difficult by the many draws

and terraces, only one weakness existed. That was on the south slope between the 505 men and A Company. As soon as B Company arrived, this could be remedied. (S)

At 1500 hours as A Company and C Company were being attacked, elements of the 2nd Battalion had relieved B Company on Unnumbered Hill. The company, moving out in single file and with a five yard interval between men, swung north along the slope of Unnumbered Hill. As it started to cross along the east slope of the saddle several rounds of enemy artillery fell in its vicinity. Soon round after round fell along the column. As men lay in a narrow sunken trail some one hundred rounds fell. (S,K,T) Before a lull in the firing allowed the group to cross the saddle, two officers had been wounded and some fifteen men killed or wounded. (S,K) The company commander estimated that some forty or fifty tanks, between one thousand and two thousand yards away, had shelled his company. Most of the rounds that fell seemed to be armor piercing. (T)

Someone on Unnumbered Hill had observed this firing and had also picked up a German battery firing from across the Calore River. Again the navy fired concentrations north of the Calore River.

When B Company arrived it took over the positions that the Engineers and the 505 men had occupied. The latter were moved along the south slope to cover the ground between B Company and A Company. (S)

Now the battalion was formed in a perimeter defense. On Unnumbered Hill elements of the 2nd Battalion were in position. The battalion aid station was in operation taking care of some twelve or fifteen casualties though no means for evacuation yet existed. (S)

Except for food, the battalion was comparatively well off for supplies. Troops of the 36th Division had left stacks of mortar ammunition, small arms, and grenades on the hill. As yet, no supplies had reached the battalion from the rear. (S)

HOLDING HILL 424

As the battalions positions were being improved and the wounded cared for, a radio message came from the regimental commander (1730 hours). The battalion was ordered to withdraw to Albanella under cover of darkness that night (17 - 18 September). After a short exchange of radio conversation the battalion commander declared he could hold the hill. Colonel Tucker agreed and instructed the battalion to await clarification. Shortly after dark, a regimental wire line reached the battalion command post. (S) A call from Colonel Tucker then rescinded the earlier order and explained that General Dawley, lacking information of the day's activities, had feared a route of the regiment. After Colonel Tucker had explained the situation, General Dawley rescinded the written message which had reached Colonel Tucker earlier. (I,S,C) The battalion would continue to hold Hill 424 and report its situation every half hour. (S)

The night of 17 - 18 September saw considerable enemy artillery concentrations on Hill 424. Only an occasional enemy automatic weapon fired. (S)

Except for local security, most of the troops spent the night sleeping. Some of them had had no sleep for thirty six hours. (S)

Prior to daylight a patrol from A Company was sent out under Lieutenant D. Horton. His patrol was to move north on the slope of Hill 424 and come back through Altavilla. After daylight the patrol returned. They had been through Altavilla and had found no enemy. (S,U,N,R) Apparently the Germans had evacuated the town. Shortly before noon the battalion commander entered the town and confirmed the patrol's report. (S,N)

About noon, regiment ordered a combat patrol to move north of the Calore River and establish enemy contact. (S) Colonel Williams directed the battalion S-2 to take his section plus a 60 mm mortar squad as far north as the town of Serre if necessary to accomplish this mission.

The patrol would take an SCR 511. When the patrol reached Serre (1500 hours) they were informed by the Italians that the Germans had moved north about an hour before the patrol arrived. (S,O)

Thus, following the enemy's last unsuccessful attack against Hill 424 he had withdrawn his forces. During the night 17 - 18 September he had abandoned Altavilla, which he could not hold while the 1st Battalion held Hill 424. (S)

After dark on 18 September the battalion S-4 arrived leading a mule train. He had brought rations which the men had been without for almost forty eight hours. Much of the load was ammunition which the battalion now had in sufficient quantity. Using carrying parties, the wounded were evacuated to Unnumbered Hill where a regimental aid station had been established. (S)

Sometime before midnight the S-3 received a message that elements of the 36th Division would relieve the battalion at dawn. As the battalion commander and the S-3 walked around the slopes of Hill 424 to alert the company commanders they ran into a column of 36th Division troops moving up. (S)

At dawn 19 September troops of the 1st Battalion moved out of their foxholes and marched through the town of Altavilla. (S)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In retrospect, an analysis of the operations of the 1st Battalion reveals several questionable errors and just as many decisive correct actions.

One glaring error is the violation of the principle of simplicity. To higher headquarters the order for the battalion to attack probably seemed as simple as A, B, C.

However, consider the actions that had to be accomplished. First, widely dispersed units had to be formed into a tactical column. Then the troops marched and hand carried weapons some four miles, exhausting

themselves before they even reached the line of departure. A sounder plan would have provided transportation for at least the supporting weapons.

Next, an economy of time on the part of higher commanders to permit smaller unit commanders sufficient time to orient platoon leaders and troops before crossing the line of departure would have helped to eliminate confusion. Patrols had reported little enemy contact on 14 - 15 September. Yet, not until noon 16 September was an attack warning order issued. The 1400 hours line of departure time was a sheer misjudgement. A night attack (16 - 17 September) would have permitted barely enough time for sufficient reconnaissance and orientation.

That VI Corps had few troops to lose goes without saying. Yet two battalions were used to attack a terrain feature critical to the enemy without close coordination between infantry - artillery - armor. Only the regard for duty got one observer to the battalion. Another less conscientious observer left the battalion completely. That Corps Artillery could not reach out far enough to cover the attack seemed to be unknown to even the forward observer.

In this attack, with its incomplete orders and uninformed subordinate leaders, control and decisions could only be based on constant and close communication. Within the battalion this was to be accomplished by moving in a single file with the battalion commander at the point. When contact was lost within the battalion column and radio communications failed, all three elements of the severed column were guilty of indifferent attempts to restore contact. The mere fact that it took twenty or thirty minutes to find out that contact had been lost was indicative of poor control by squad leaders and platoon leaders. Although the men were aware that the battalion was moving through enemy lines, the failure of two men to insure that the man behind was following jeopardized the success of the operation.

The further failure of communications between battalion and regi-

ment, regiment and corps caused a corps commander who had an incomplete, gloomy picture of the situation to order a withdrawal. Rather than risk the loss of two battalions which would create a gap in his lines he was forced to an action that was unwarranted.

The ability of company commanders, separated from the battalion commander, to carry on in their mission is creditable. The C Company commander, in moving to Hill 424, denied the enemy the use of this hill. Apparently, even during the period from C Company's withdrawal to A Company's return, the Germans did not obtain control of the hill.

The fact that B Company kept moving, even when the easier plan would have been to join the 2nd Battalion on Hill 344, gave the battalion commander an effective fighting force on Unnumbered Hill.

The critical portion of the approach march was when A Company turned the east flank of the five machine guns along Hill 315. Had the company moved into their final protective fires and been disorganized Unnumbered Hill would probably not have been held. Since the 2nd Battalion had established itself on Hill 344, only B Company with an insufficient force would have been on Unnumbered Hill. C Company on Hill 424 would have been surrounded. As it developed, the piecemeal attack of the German forces on Hill 424 and Unnumbered Hill allowed forces on both of these hills to dispose themselves to meet these attacks.

Much credit should go to the ordinary soldier. Though he knew that at times his commanders were lost and that he was within enemy lines he moved willingly and did not shirk his duties. Even when direct tank fire fell into the foxholes of B Company, he held his position, trusting in his commander's ability to cope with the situation. When his friend was wounded and, as on Hill 424, left without medical aid he did all he could to assist him. Orders that may have seemed suicidal to him were carried out promptly. Such was the case of the second scout in the 1st Platoon of A Company and the volunteers on Hill 424 who at-

tempted to get reinforcements.

In summation, the 1st Battalion, 504 Parachute Infantry accomplished its mission of seizing Hill 424. Though the attack was not conducted as simply as it might have been, the end excused the means. It has been contended that the Germans only gave up Hill 424 when they were ready (E-79), but the strength and bitterness of the German attacks on 17 September would seem to contradict this statement. The losses the enemy took attacking the battalion would hardly justify a delaying action. Though the losses to the regiment, most of them in the 1st Battalion, were thirty killed and one hundred fifty wounded, the Germans suffered several times that number of killed and wounded.

For various activities on Unnumbered Hill and Hill 424, three men received Distinguished Service Crosses and five men received Silver Stars.

LESSONS

From this operation the battalion learned much that was to serve them in good stead in further operations. Among the lessons learned were that:

1. An attack requires that complete information be disseminated all the way down to the private if possible. At the minimum, squad leaders should know what, where, and how. One company commander casualty would have prevented the success of this operation.
2. Except for unusual conditions, infantry attacks should be closely coordinated with artillery and, if possible, armor. The battalion moving with only one forward observer was unable to effectively employ the mass of corps artillery.
3. Troops must reach a line of departure in sufficient time to rest and reorganize. The 81 mm mortar platoon played no effective part in the operation since it could not physically keep up.
4. Contact between units on the march is essential. Men must be

trained and imbued with the need for constant checking to be sure that they have not lost contact.

5. Reliance on only one means of communication is a fallacy. Communications must be maintained even if it is only by messenger or patrol. Without communications the battalion commander maneuvered for some six hours with just A Company.

6. Antitank weapons of greater range than a bazooka must accompany foot troops. Tanks firing at B Company were doing so with all the advantages on the side of the tank crews.

7. Attacking an enemy from an unexpected direction will confuse him and cause many of his plans to backfire. Such was the case on Unnumbered Hill when on the morning of 17 September a German force, apparently only expecting to move into positions from which to fight, ran into A Company.

8. Men must be familiar with methods of destroying materiel. Two men of C Company, probably through ignorance, failed to destroy an enemy tank. The tank killed one of these men the following morning. Men of the 36th Division, in their withdrawal, had left stacks of mortar and small arms ammunition.

9. Once a patrol is dispatched with instructions, provisions must be made to accomplish the instructions. If the regimental commander had left a contact party at the well they would have met Company A and Company B. The battalion could have been on Hill 424 at daylight.

10. Commanders must provide for all aspects of combat before a battle. Not only ammunition, but also food and medical aid must be coordinated. Men know they must fight. They expect their commanders to provide for food and medical aid.